

AUGUST 1995

*Field Naturalists
Club of Ballarat*
Incorporated

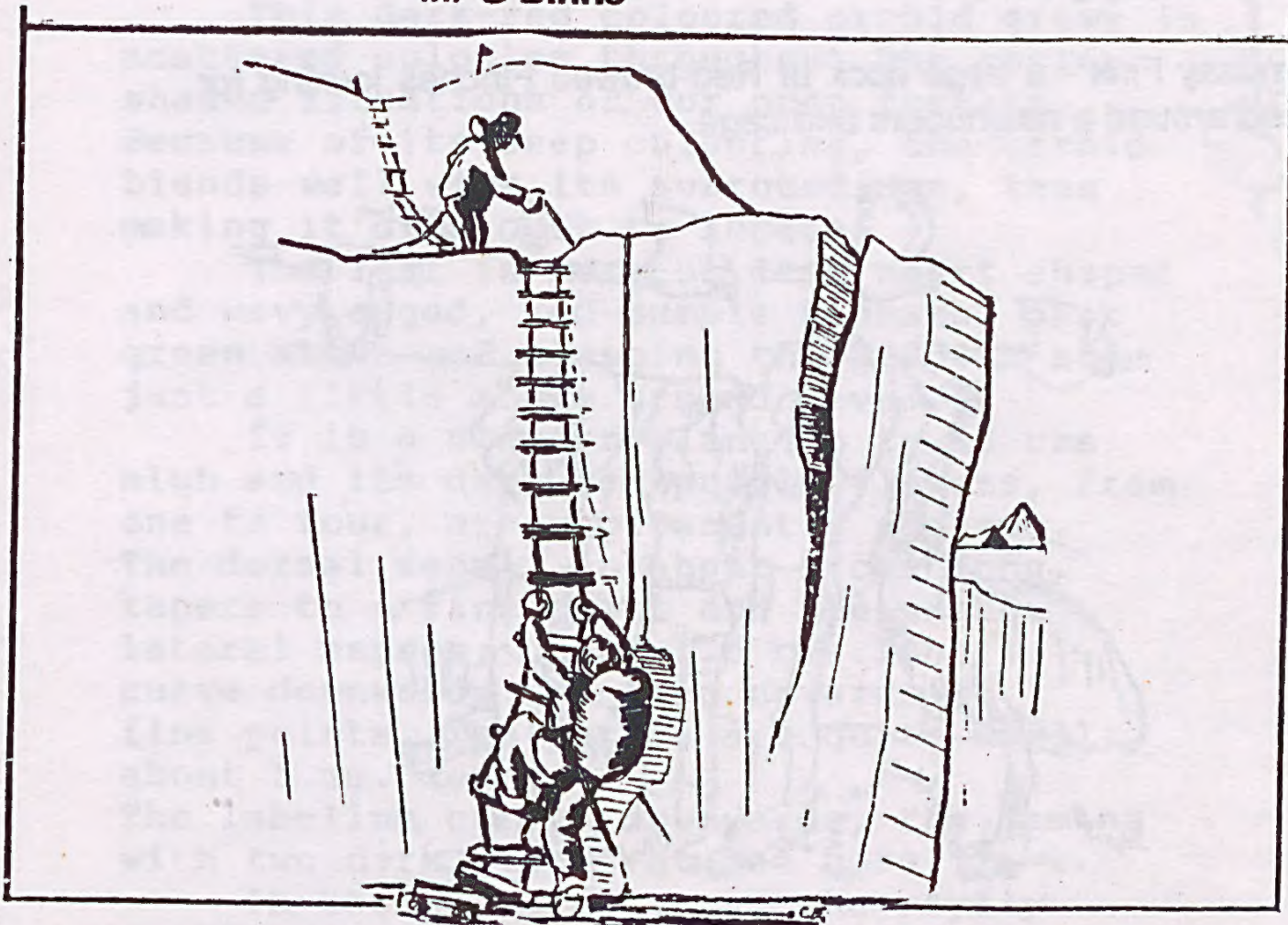
EXCURSION - NEWS SHEET

**Meeting Aug 4 Mrs A Barlow and Mrs D Brooke:
A Himalayan Experience**

**Meeting Sep 1 Dr K McDonnell and Mr J Gregurke:
Workshop on Plant Form**

**Excursion Aug 6 Yarrowee Creek Walk:
Mrs S Davison (half day)**

**Excursion Sep 3 Clunes Forests and Swamps:
Mr G Binns**



President: Mr J Gregurke
Secretary: Mr L Fink
Treasurer: Mr G Binns
Editor: Mr A Dyson

PO Box 328W Ballarat West 3350

MEETINGS are held at the School of
Mines & Industries, Art Building,
Lydiard St. Sth., 7.30 pm.

EXCURSIONS start at "Book City",
cnr. Sturt and Annetrong Sts 9.30 am
(full day outings) or 1.30 pm (half day)

FIELD REPORTS

Alan Morrison - there was little to see on a recent visit to Winter Swamp. Alan sighted a few Black Duck, some Swampheens, a few Plovers and many gulls.

Ken McDonnell - a neighbour had seen three Brolgas on the road between Ascot and Creswick.

Frank Harrap - Pied Currawongs feeding on sunflower seeds in his garden at Mount Helen. Also feeding were Grey Shrike-thrushes.

Tony Dyson - Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos roosting in Black Wattles at Durham Lead. The nearby pine forests would be a local feeding ground.

Lyndsay Fink - a large flock of Red-browed Finches looking for seed around a neighbours bird cage.



DIARY DATES

Wednesday 23 August, 7.30pm - Committee meeting at Margaret Rotheram's house -

ORCHIDS of the BALLARAT DISTRICT

No. 20 of a series

Scientific Name : Acianthus caudatus

(Greek: acies = point
anthos = flower,
in reference to the long
fine points of the sepals).

Common Name : Mayfly orchid,
Dead horse orchid

Flowering time in this district:

September to October

This dark-red coloured orchid grows in scattered colonies throughout the cooler shaded situations of our open forests. Because of its deep colouring, the orchid blends well with its surroundings, thus making it difficult to locate.

The leaf is more or less heart shaped and wavy edged, red-purple beneath, dark green above and clasping the reddish stem just a little above ground level.

It is a slender plant up to 17 cms high and its dark red-purple flowers, from one to four, are unpleasantly odorous. The dorsal sepal, to about 3 cms long, tapers to a fine point and the narrow lateral sepals, up to 1.5 cms long, curve downwards and then upwards to fine points. The petals are quite small, about 5 mm. long.

The labellum curves downwards, the lamina with two dark glands at the base.

In the Ballarat area, the mayfly orchid can usually be seen in the Enfield, Ross Creek, Teesdale, Mt. Doran and the Durham Lead forests.



Patricia Murphy

ASTRONOMY NIGHT - JULY MEETING

Before we headed up to the Observatory Tony gave us an introductory talk and showed several slides to whet our appetites.

Tony spoke on the main features of the solar system including the four inner terrestrial (rock-like) planets, *Mercury*, *Venus*, *Earth* and *Mars*, and the five outer (frozen) gas planets, *Jupiter*, *Saturn*, *Uranus*, *Neptune* and *Pluto*, with their respective moons. He then briefly described stars, including our Sun, their energy source, starlight including its information content and the estimation of stellar distances.

His talk concluded with slides showing telescopes, the sun, planets and some of their moons, where the images were taken by Voyager and Mariner space probes.

We were met at the observatory by Karenza Burk and other members of the BAS. Karenza spoke to us about their group, the buildings, the telescopes, and then we were blessed by the weather which cleared and allowed us to do some observing.

The Ballarat Observatory owes its existence to James Oddie, a leading local philanthropist. Astronomy was one of his many interests and due to his persistence, a three acre site in the White Horse Ranges was chosen to site the observatory. In 1885 the site was gazetted. The work of clearing and erecting buildings was financed by James Oddie, who late in 1885, donated the buildings to the Ballarat School of Mines. The astronomical work was entrusted to Captain Evans Baker and by January 1886 a twelve-and-a-half inch Newtonian telescope which he built himself, was in operation. The official opening took place on 11 May 1886. James Oddie brought a cottage from Sebastopol to the observatory grounds which housed Captain Baker and his family. (The cottage has since been demolished but there are remnants of plantings made during that time.)

Other telescopes were commissioned but after the death of Captain Baker in 1890 the observatory suffered neglect through lack of professional supervision. In 1903 the School of Mines asked the City Council to take responsibility and after twelve years of further neglect the council accepted responsibility. Mr John Brittain was appointed a curator and things began to improve. John Brittain was an accomplished astronomer. He took classes, kept meteorological records, wrote columns for the *Ballarat Star*, encouraged visitors and was greatly missed at the end of his thirty years at the observatory. He was succeeded by Alexander Caird who continued the public education programmes until his death in 1947.

In 1958 the Ballarat branch of the Astronomical Society of Victoria was formed and later in the year the society became independent and was renamed the Ballarat Astronomical Society. The BAS has a membership of about fifty people.



There are three main buildings which make up the complex. The Baker Hall is a weatherboard building featuring eight stained glass windows which were all donated by local businesses and organisations. The front section of the roof has a low pitched gable while the rear section is of arched corrugated iron set on a frame which slides back enabling the twenty-six inch Baker telescope to be used. A metal frame at the back of the building supports the roof when it has been pulled back.



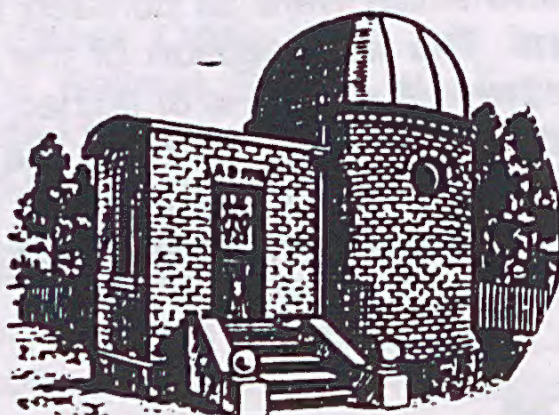
The adjacent Oddie Building contains the eight inch telescope constructed by Captain Baker. This is also weatherboard with a low pitched roof. A pressed metal ceiling and a superb window are features of the building. The stained glass window, presented by the *Ballarat Courier* in 1914, features planets in the upper section and a kookaburra and magpie perching on a gum tree, with the sun rising in the background.

The Jelbart Observatory was constructed in 1918 to house the telescope donated by the Jelbart Brothers, a Ballarat engineering firm. The bricks for the building were donated, voluntary labour was utilized for construction and the stained glass windows were donated. This building has a circular plan and the room housing the telescope has a domed roof which is able to open and rotate in conjunction with the operation of the telescope.

Thanks to Karenza and Robert Bell we experienced a "hands on" astronomy lesson. We clearly saw the double stars of *Alpha Centauri*, one of the two Pointers of the Southern Cross. We viewed the multi-coloured open cluster group appropriately called the Jewel Box. The four moons of *Jupiter*, were seen - two lined up on each side. The moon itself was breath-taking, the lunar surface of bright, heavily cratered highland terrain so clearly seen was the highlight of the night for many of us.

Our thanks to the BAS for making us welcome and special thanks to Karenza .

VD



NEWS FROM OTHER GROUPS

The Victorian Naturalist of June 1995 has two particularly interesting pieces:

(1) a detailed article titled *Whipstick Nature Trail* by R J Fletcher. The article follows one on the same subject written for the same journal in 1968 and in 1994 the author set out to retrace the original route. A map accompanies the text as well as plant lists.

(2) a small report by Cecily Falkingham titled *Those Amazing Mistletoe Plants*. Cecily Falkingham criticises those who have overpruned trees to remove mistletoe with small regard for the food and shelter this "marvellous plant" provides. An interesting view of the plant's uses, its adaptability and of changes in its occurrence over the years.

There is also an index to Volume III (ie the 1994 volumes) in this edition.

FLAME-ROBIN

WILLIE WAGTAIL



Australian Mammals Found In the Ballarat Area No6

Gould's Long Eared Bat

Nyctophilus gouldi. Order Chiroptera, Sub Order Microchiroptera, Family Vespertilionidae.

Goulds Long Eared Bat inhabits the area of high rainfall not occupied by the similar and closely related Greater Long Eared Bat, it is gregarious and bat colonies of up to 25 individuals and small groups have been found in tree hollows, vacant buildings, rolled up bags and under loose bark as well as foraging flying insects it also gleans them from foliage and ants have been found in their stomachs.

They hibernate during colder months in Southern areas and rouse when the temperature reaches 16 degrees C. Twin young are known to be born in early summer but it is probable that later births also occur.

Their status is common there are no sub species, they should be common in the Ballarat area.

Lesser Long Eared Bat

Nyctophilus geoffroyi.

Possibly the most wide ranging bat in Australia and abundant throughout it's range. The Lesser Long Eared Bat has adapted particularly well to human presence. Being found in inter city and urban environments as well, it roosts in a variety of habitats, roofs, rolled canvas, hanging clothes left outside and occasionally in the nests of fairy martins, it seems to need warm humid conditions and tolerates extreme heat up to 40 degrees centigrade.

It emerges just after dark to forage for insects in cold and wet conditions it may hunt for only an hour, during winter it is torpid and slow to become aroused. In summer it is active even in roosting sites and is capable of taking to the wing immediately it is disturbed.

It is believed to have a short echo system and hunts near and sometimes on the ground. Maternity colonies of 10 to 100 individuals births occurring in late spring to summer, twins are common.

Their status is abundant there are no sub species They would be found in and around Ballarat.

Elfin